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Schooling at Night

*Ruth Jensen tells the story
of adult education in Iowa*

THE little red school house is now staying open nights. No, the boys and girls aren't going to classes after dark, but their fathers and mothers are.

Adult evening classes are sponsored by the State Board of Education for vocational education, and they reach the non-professional type of persons. Conducted in the community high schools by the teachers of agriculture and homemaking, the courses are offered not only in agriculture and homemaking, but distributive occupations, such as retail selling, trades and industry, as well.

Surveys made by the State Board of Education show that more than 12,000 adults were reached last year as compared with 11,000 students enrolled in colleges and universities. Who can say that education ceases when formal school days are over?

These evening schools usually begin with a fellowship luncheon or supper for all in attendance. This is followed by minutes of special interest groups and the general evening school forum winds up the program for the evening. The purpose of the forum is that of securing a comprehensive over-view of the trends of the times.

To help secure and hold attendance most of the schools have a large and active advisory council and follow certain procedures which include early and definite enrollment, an enrollment fee, extensive farm visitations and personal contact, organization of the class into squads with council members in charge, squad meetings, group demonstrations, tours of local communities, use of attendance certificates and the promotion of social and recreational activities to supplement class work. Classes are held from November 1st to March 31st, and are now being presented in 40 high schools throughout the state.

Subjects offered in the little red school houses are livestock breeding, agriculture, economics and rural sociology, crops and soils, farm mechanics, agricultural engineering and general miscellaneous subjects. Livestock production has been the most popular course offered, with farm management and agricultural economics following closely behind.

The increase in enrollment in this course seems to be due to the recent shifting of emphasis to the economic side of farming. Few courses in farm mechanics have been given, because the shop facilities available have been inadequate for the large classes enrolled.

The evening classes might be said to have had a mushroom growth, for since they were begun in 1926-27 thousands of Iowa men and their wives have attended. The original idea cannot be traced to any one person or organization, but one of the more concrete inspirations came from the Des Moines Public Forums.

Perhaps one might say that George Washington, Ben Franklin and John Madison were responsible for

the scheme in the beginning as it is a matter of history that each one in his time wanted to bring the knowledge of contemporary scientists to the practical farmers.

In Washington's first message to Congress he advocated the idea of having men of science and letters travel the country side and talk to farmers and men of the community. In that situation the college came to the student.

Prof. A. H. Hausrath, of the Vocational Education Department, was one of the pioneers in the teaching of adult classes. He conducted a first class in agriculture in 1925 and was instrumental in starting the state-wide program of adult education.

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